

CUTTING EDGE

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Free Fees- a mixed blessing

Will Niamh Breathnach's decision to introduce 'free fees' for third level education facilitate access for students from low income backgrounds? Let us consider the fears of some students:

Q: As a student already in receipt of a local authority grant, what will the introduction of free fees do for me?

A: Nothing

Q: As a student with a maintenance grant that covers less than half the costs of living away from home, what will free fees do for me?

A: Nothing

Q: If students from higher professional groups are 18 times more likely to go to college than students from unskilled categories, will free fees encourage a balance?

A: No

We could pick more holes but there are positives. Free fees will help destroy the mental and cultural barrier to higher education. People forget full-time third level students are young or mature unemployed adults without income in their own right.

But free fees should be accompanied by a programme to address the other problems, some of which were outlined. Low maintenance grants must be increased and free fees extended to part time and post graduate students.

Additional places are needed, Irish universities can now only accommodate around 18% of school leavers. The E.U. average is 30%. There should be better library space provision. Better pre-school facilities, home-school liaison schemes, smaller numbers in classes, more counsellors and remedial teachers are also required.

Removal of fees, while essential, is not enough in itself to ensure full equality of participation in education.

Welcome to College

A message from Proinsias de Rossa, leader of Democratic Left and Minister for Social welfare.



YOU have made it to college. Well done. Good luck. Enjoy it. College is not just a place of study; a graduate factory. It is an experience. Where we learn about life; explore ideas; fill out as people.

The campus is a unique environment. But college cannot evade the influences of society and society must endure the products of the campus. How the architect is educated will decide what future buildings will look like. How the country is run will ultimately determine how much can be taught and learned in the lecture hall and laboratory.

Democratic Left invites students to explore this relationship between education and society. Many able young people cannot go to college simply because they cannot afford it. Democratic Left believes in equality of opportunity and working within government we will be highlighting the need to improve equality of access. But we are also concerned with issues of control, content and relevance.

Democracy in education - and society - begins with the individual, and his or her willingness to get involved. We want to hear from students who will join with us in building the politics of the future.

A Guide to Student Politics

• A recent graduate gives some jaundiced advice to Freshers

Many people think of the hey-day of student politics as being the events which rocked Europe in May, 1968, and disparage the present generation of students as being not 'radical' enough. The student leaders of 1968 in Ireland were the likes of Kevin Myers!, Ruari Quinn!. Even Henry Kelly! So it is perhaps not surprising that Ireland does not carry a great reputation for campus revolution.

College is described by many as a microcosm of Irish society. This may be true, if Irish society is all one large, comfortable middle-class suburb of South Dublin. The fact that Irish colleges are so overwhelmingly dominated by a relatively small social group is reflected in the kind of people who get involved in politics while at college. There are two distinguishable groups to watch out for. The first, most typical group are the rugby-shirted 'Tristan and Zoe' brigade who joined Fianna Fail/ Fine Gael because Daddy said it would look good on a CV and would be useful for making connections to help him with his land rezoning applications.

These people think you're working class if you live in a three-bedroom house, shop at Dunnes Stores in the Stephen's Green centre and have only one German car between the whole family. They will be first up against the wall when the revolution comes. But that

will not stop them making your time at college a rather unpleasant experience!.

The other group are the supposed 'revolutionaries' who derive their understanding of Marxism less from Das Kapital or the Grundrisse, than from Groucho, Chico and Harpo in 'Duck Soup'. Avoid these people like the plague. Don't even acknowledge their existence. Otherwise you will be harassed for the rest of your college career by their attempts to get you to join their group. While they might appear at first glance to hold some progressive views, the glazed-over eyes, constant repetition of stock words and phrases and desperate attempts to sell you their 'literature' is a dead giveaway. (If they lived in California they would be sporting shaven heads, saffron robes and handing out flowers. It's the same mindset, but just a different cult.)

This is not to say that student politics is irrelevant. On the contrary issues like student poverty, access for all to education and the provision of adequate resources to college facilities have to be fought over. Remember, student politics might not be as interesting or glamorous as other college activities, but it still counts. So, if you want to be part of a group trying to make a real difference in the real world, join **Democratic Left Youth**

Green Left

One of the cornerstones of the politics of Democratic Left is Green politics. It has to be - it'd be hard to build a lasting socialist society on an endangered planet. And it's the free-market system that is endangering it.

Industrial pollution comes about because enterprise is run for the profit of the few rather than the health and wealth of all. Most people wish to change this - but their opinions don't get a look in. (Is that democracy?)

Right wing economists say that massive economic growth is what is needed to help the

worst off. Growth takes place, with massive damage to the environment - and only the rich gain. What's needed is sustainable growth - with full employment and wealth redistribution.

Only Democratic Control of the economy, fair distribution of ownership and justice for the Third World can save the environment. And that's a fairly good definition of socialism.

Green Left parties like the Democratic Left are on the advance throughout Europe. One reason why is that we have a serious approach to the most urgent political question facing the entire world - its survival.

SUPPORT FOR THE THIRD WORLD

Somewhere in the world an airliner crashes killing all 300 passengers on board. News of the crash is carried on every radio and TV bulletin and on the front page of every newspaper. There is a top level inquiry and no effort is spared to elicit the causes of the tragedy.

It is now estimated that more than 40 million people a year die from hunger and hunger related diseases - the equivalent of more than 30 such airline crashes every day.

Poverty is one of the roots of world hunger. The U.N. estimates that 1.2 billion people are poor, that's one in every five of the earth's population. Hunger fuels the scramble for land and this in turn has given rise to wars and local conflicts.

The burden of international debt and unfair trading systems also contribute to increasing hunger. During the last decade, as the debt crisis worsened, the cutting of food subsidies as well as reduced investment in health and education programmes throughout the developing world brought even greater misery to the poor.

Democratic Left Youth is committed to international solidarity. We strongly support the peoples of the developing world who are struggling. Youth are currently campaigning against the exploitation of child slave labour in developing countries to service western markets.

♦ We have an obligation to work for human rights and development in the third world.



Northern Ireland

DEMOCRATIC LEFT believes that political parties of Northern Ireland should resolve the problems of that society in an exclusively peaceful and democratic way.

In Government, Democratic Left is helping to develop the peace process and has been centrally involved in the promotion of the Framework Document. That document doesn't point to a perfect solution to Northern Ireland's problems. Instead it identifies the need for pragmatism and compromise in the search for a solution that will enable the people of different traditions to co-exist and co-operate.

Democratic Left members are active in communities throughout the north, like in Dungannon where Gerry Cullen has been elected to the local council. One of our party's delegation to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation is Seamus Lynch, a candidate in the last British general election in Belfast.

The British and Irish governments must make every effort to promote political progress. But similarly paramilitaries must ensure an end to punishment beatings and other sectarian attacks.

No To Nuclear Testing

It's mushroom cloud time again as Jacques Chirac seem to have decided that a round of post-colonial muscle flexing is in order. Mr. Chirac's decision to hold this series of tests in the 10th anniversary year of the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior and the 50th of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is a disgraceful decision.

Worldwide outrage will move the French government, we must sustain these protests. DL Youth demonstrated outside the French Embassy and if they carry on we'll be back there.

♦ You can help!

Write to the French Government or the French Embassy, 36 Ailesbury Road, Dublin 4 and register your objections to this unnecessary threat to the people of the South Pacific.

DL Youth want a Minimum Wage

Have you ever thought how unfair maintenance grants really are? Think of living away from home, with all the expenses that go with this, and receiving just £1,500.

For students in financial difficulty the options are:

Borrow, put additional pressure on parents, or get a job.

Say you get a job. What then? What have you got to look forward to? £1.50 an hour, £2 an hour, £2.50 an hour? If you are *really lucky* you may get more than £3 an hour. And it is not just students who face these rates.

With such a high level of unemployment, it is an employers' market. Employers are able to dictate conditions and pay (with same guidelines offered through Employment law).

The need for a national minimum wage is obvious. To protect the student who is forced to work during the college

year, or during the summer, when they are not entitled to unemployment assistance, and those forced into low pay employment

If you are appalled by the prospect of low wages, you know your choice; be docile, do nothing and accept it. Or get active and help change it.

Democratic Left Youth will be campaigning for a national minimum wage over the coming months.

ACCOMMODATION

Many students for the first time in their lives will be leaving home to start college. These years are meant to be the best times of their lives, can be spoiled by accommodation problems

How many students have had to live in dumps with no proper facilities and tyrant landlords? The accommodation problem can be alleviated if some sensible down to earth rules are followed.

- ◆ Always insist on a rent book. This will include the amount, conditions and purpose of the deposit. Its protection for the student against the not so nice landlords.
- ◆ Look at 5 or 6 different places before you decide on anywhere to live. Talk to the landlords.
- ◆ Find out what facilities are available i.e. is it smoker (non), if you're vegetarian will you be catered for and so on.
- ◆ If the landlord wants to throw you out with or without a reason, he must give at least one month's notice to quit.

If you do have trouble with your landlords contact your students' union immediately.



JOIN DL YOUTH!

I enclose £1 membership fee.

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